

Pure white magic

To be sure of good snow this winter head high, advises JANE SLADE, who recommends five great resorts guaranteed to give you a perfect week on the slopes and plenty of fun besides

SAAS FEE, SWITZERLAND:

Best for... family skiers and snowboarders

This chocolate-box Alpine resort is within striking distance of a glacier and a dozen 13,000ft peaks so you can bank on fresh snow throughout the winter. A good chunk of the 86 miles of slopes are on a glacier and those that aren't are covered by snow cannons.

The pedestrianised streets are peppered with wooden chalets rather than high-rise hotels, giving it a lovely village feel and making it safer for children. Après-ski is also good with plenty of underground bars and nightclubs (try Popcorn Disco, Go Inn and Crazy Night).

● *The Family Ski Company* (01684 540 333/www.familyski.co.uk) offers seven nights' half-board staying in a chalet hotel in Saas Fee from £1,476 (family of four sharing), including transfers. *Snowjet* (020 8652 1222/www.snowjet.co.uk) offers return flights from Stansted to Sion from £98pp.

MORZINE, FRANCE

Best for... accessing the largest linked ski area in the world

The Portes du Soleil area (3,280ft to 8,068ft) encompasses 13 ski resorts in France and Switzerland including Avoriaz, Chatel and Les Gets with 230 lifts and 403 miles of piste. No matter how good you are you will never ski every run in a week.

Morzine lies at the heart of this amazing region; the proximity to Mont Blanc means it gets regular snow dumps. Backed up by 694 snow-making cannons, conditions are usually superb all winter every winter. It is one of the few ski regions that can also boast something for everyone, with 266 pistes to choose from.

You can also get a great-value lift pass from €616 covering a family of four for seven days with a 20 per cent reduction for the smaller Morzine-Les Gets region.

● *Crystal Ski* (0871 231 2256/www.crystalski.co.uk) offers seven nights' half-board at the Hotel Viking in Morzine from £449pp (two

sharing), including return flights from Gatwick and transfers.

VAL D'ISÈRE, FRANCE

Best for... great skiing, non-skiers and serious nightlife

Val' d'Isère really needs no introduction to serious skiers and snowboarders. It's always been fashionable among off-piste enthusiasts and mogul bashers as it boasts a phenomenal ski terrain with an altitude of 11,480ft, which guarantees great snow conditions most of the year.

It has become a cool choice among non-skiing friends and partners too with a newly opened sports centre in the town with two swimming pools (one for children, complete with slides and water fountains), a climbing wall, gym, sauna, Turkish bath and two squash courts. There is also a new outdoor ice rink if you fancy swapping your skis for skates.

One night a week cars are banned from the town centre, which is turned into an entertainment arena with ice sculptors, music and fireworks. There is live music at the big and happening Moris Pub and dancing until the small hours at seminal Dick's Tea Bar.

● *Snowline* (0844 557 3118/www.snowline.co.uk) offers seven nights' half-board at Chalet Killy from £789pp (two sharing), including return flights from Gatwick and transfers.



COURMAYEUR, ITALY

Best for... gourmet food lovers and weekend breaks

Courmayeur in Italy's Aosta Valley, within easy reach of both Geneva and Milan airports, is the place to which fur-clad Milanese decamp at weekends and it's not hard to see why. Its cobbled streets boast gorgeous boutiques and some of the best restaurants in the Alps. The skiing's not bad either.

Courmayeur is high. The resort lies at 4,014ft above sea level and the slopes rise to a giddy 11,355ft on the Toulua glacier. Backed up with masses of snow-making, Courmayeur guarantees a good dusting of the white stuff whenever you choose to visit.

The terrain is a combination of easy, wide-open pistes and heart-in-mouth challenging runs. If it's sunny, hire a high-mountain guide to take you down the 13-mile-long Vallée Blanche; a phenomenal off-piste route across the stunning "mer de glace" passing towering peaks and glaciers.

Courmayeur really excels on the food front too. Try the delicious hors d'oeuvres and pasta dishes at Pierre Alexis in the town centre or for fine dining book a table at the Cadran Solaire (the Sundial), the town's oldest restaurant, with a 16th-century vaulted bar where you must sample the house speciality: duck breast and plums.

A good lunchtime option is Christiania at the top of the cable car on the Plan Checrouit, which makes the biggest thin-crust pizzas on the planet. Those with a large appetite should also try the 36-course banquet served at La Maison de Filippo (www.lamaison.com) slightly out of town in Entreves. Great value at just £50 a head.

● **Momentum Ski** (020 7371 9111/ www.momentumski.com) offers three nights staying in a three-

star B&B in Courmayeur from £395pp (two sharing), including return flights from Gatwick and car hire.

DEER VALLEY, USA

Best for... children, and ski-in/ski-out accommodation

Deer Valley (6,569ft to 9,567ft), 40 minutes from Salt Lake City in Utah and next door to film icon Robert Redford's private ski resort of Sundance, boasts the finest, driest powder in the world.

This, combined with meticulously groomed runs spread over five peaks accessed by 11 high-speed lifts makes it a safe choice for children. Best of all, snowboarders are banned, which reduces the collision count.

Slopeside accommodation is mainly in big condos and hotels, so it's perfect for ski-in/ski out. There are lots of pint-sized facilities too, including a centre for non-skiing tiny tots. You can also find plenty of inexpensive children's menus and discounted sleigh rides and dog sled treks to help keep the costs down in this otherwise fairly pricey resort.

Expect billiard table-smooth beginner trails on Bald Eagle mountain and Little Baldy Peak and a great day out should you choose to visit the exciting Utah Olympic Park.

Don't miss the Xtreme Zipline. For \$22 you can enjoy a 55-mile-an-hour speed ride.

● **Ski Independence** (01312 438 097/www.ski-i.com) offers seven nights' B&B at the Stein Eriksen lodge from £1,640pp (up to four sharing), including return flights from Heathrow and transfers.





CHALLENGE: The area around Morzine has 403 miles of piste and great snow that will keep skiers and playful youngsters (below) happy